

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 174 900

CG 013 691

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TITLE Development of Sex-Role Orientation in Adolescent Females and Its Relationship to Teacher Ratings.
PUB DATE [77]
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, California, April 9-12, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; *Androgyny; *Females; High School Students; *Identification (Psychological); Interpersonal Competence; Personal Growth; Secondary Education; *Sex Role; Student Behavior; Student Development; *Student Teacher Relationship; *Teacher Attitudes

IDENTIFIERS *Ben Sex Role Inventory

ABSTRACT

The development and expression of sex-role identity in adolescent females and the views of teachers regarding these behaviors were investigated. Adolescent sophomore and junior females were given the Ben Sex Role Inventory during fall and spring semesters. Teacher ratings of seven characteristics were also obtained. Mean masculinity and femininity scores increased during fall and spring of the sophomore year, suggesting movement from 'undifferentiated' sex-role orientations to more definitively masculine, feminine, or androgynous. Regression analyses indicated that significant predictability of teacher ratings of instrumental behaviors, i.e., responsibility, independence, and insight, from sex-role orientations began to emerge in the latter half of the sophomore year and were strong in the fall of the junior year. (Author)

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Development of sex-role orientation in adolescent
females and its relationship to teacher ratings

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Running head: Development of sex-role orientation in adolescent

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Development of sex-role orientation in adolescent females and its relationship to teacher ratings

An abundance of theoretical and empirical progress has been made describing and attempting to explain the development and expression of gender identity in pre-and elementary school children (Conger, 1977). In addition, recent research emphases (Bem, 1974; 1975) have been placed upon the attribution and expression of either masculine or feminine characteristics, as well as the ability to effectively achieve a balance between the two discrete sets of attributes (androgyny). The focus of this research trend has been the college population, composed of individuals beyond the identity formation years, whose sex-role orientation has crystalized. Developmentally, large gaps exist in the relevant literature, when one considers the lack of data concerned with the adolescent years, a period of tremendous transition, during which time orientation towards one's sex-role undoubtedly will be modified. Viewing sex-role from a developmental perspective allows for a fuller explanation of the progression towards androgyny than could be obtained from the perspective proposed by Bem (1975). It is therefore suggested that sex-role identity becomes consistent during adolescence, following a reorganization that occurs as the youth adjusts to a changing physical structure, increasing cognitive capabilities, new school and vocational experiences, increasing responsibility demands and adult role expectations, and modified interpersonal relationships (Dreyer, Note 1). The questions have become: when does this sex-role development occur, how is it reflected in behavior, and what are the reactions of others towards adolescents during this 'crystalization' period? These questions become pertinent when considering the adolescent female and her early

high school experiences. Therefore, the focus of the present study was to describe the development and expression of sex-role identity in adolescent females and to explore how significant others (e.g. teachers) view related behaviors by those females.

METHOD

Subjects. A total of 376 adolescent females, enrolled fulltime in classes at a public school in a medium-sized Midwestern city, initially were subjects for the present study. Complete data that included teacher ratings were collected for 83 sophomores and 73 juniors during the fall semester (October) and for 74 sophomores and 65 juniors during April of the spring semester. On each occasion, all subjects were tested together in an auditorium setting. Behavioral evaluations of each subject were obtained from homeroom teachers at approximately the same times of measurement.

Procedure. A self-rating instrument was completed by all subjects (the Bem Sex Role Inventory). Sixty items comprise the BSRI, including equal numbers of masculine, feminine, and neutral adjectives. The placement of these items was modified so that adjectives were randomly ordered instead of being presented in their usual alternating order. Subjects rated themselves on a scale of 1 (Never or almost never true) to 7 (Always or almost always true) for each adjective. Separate masculinity, femininity, and T (androgyny) scores were calculated for each subject by the standard procedures (Bem, 1974).

In addition to the self-rating, a 40-item checklist (adapted from the Jesness Behavior Checklist, 1970) was administered to the homeroom teacher for each subject. For every item, teachers rated each subject on a six point scale "as you have known her during the past month". From this questionnaire, teacher assessments of seven characteristics

were obtained. The seven characteristics incorporated in this checklist were: friendliness, responsibility, independence, rapport, sociability, calmness, and insight. Therefore, from these instruments three predictor variables - masculinity, femininity, and T (androgyny) scores - were obtained for each subject as were seven criterion variables (teacher ratings).

RESULTS

In the initial analyses, mean masculinity, femininity, and T-scores for 376 subjects were submitted to separate 2(grade) X 2(time of measurement) ANOVAs. For masculinity scores, significance was found for year, $F(1,372) = 35.07$, $p < .0001$, time of measurement, $F(1,372) = 13.80$, $p < .0005$, and their interaction, $F(1, 372) = 14.75$, $p < .0004$. Tukey's HSD revealed the mean masculinity scores differed significantly ($p < .01$) between the fall of the sophomore year ($\bar{X} = 3.52$) and the spring of that year ($\bar{X} = 4.44$) and between fall of the sophomore year and fall of the junior year ($\bar{X} = 4.71$). A similar analysis of mean femininity scores revealed an identical pattern. Significance was found for year, $F(1, 372) = 59.28$, $p < .0001$, time, $F(1, 372) = 21.57$, $p < .0001$, and for their interaction, $F(1, 372) = 15.25$, $p < .0003$. Tukey's HSD again showed that the significance arose between femininity scores of sophomores in the fall ($\bar{X} = 4.10$) and for sophomores in the spring ($\bar{X} = 4.82$). Between fall of the sophomore year and fall of the junior year ($\bar{X} = 5.00$), mean femininity ratings were also significantly different. No such significance was reported in the analyses of T scores.

In order to avoid placing subjects in discrete categories on the basis of their BSRI scores, multiple regression analyses were performed on the continuous data for all subjects. Seven teacher ratings were regressed onto three sex-role orientation ratings. Predictor variables

were masculinity, femininity, and T scores. Criterion variables were the mean ratings made by the teachers of friendliness, independence, responsibility, rapport, sociability, calmness, and insight. Separate analyses were performed for the two grade levels and for both times of measurement.

Although no significance was observed for the regression analyses of fall scores for sophomores, results indicated that by spring of the sophomore year, masculinity self-ratings significantly predicted the independence ratings of the teachers, $F(4,69) = 8.65$, $p < .005$. These masculinity scores also approached significance as predictors of the teacher ratings labeled responsibility and insight, $F(4,69) = 2.94$, $p < .09$; $F(4,69) = 3.08$, $p < .08$, respectively. In addition, femininity and T scores on the BSRI significantly predicted the spring independence evaluations for sophomores, $F(4,69) = 7.81$, $p < .007$, $F(4,69) = 6.93$, $p < .01$, respectively. No other significant relationships were observed.

Analyses of scores for juniors, obtained in the fall semester, indicated that masculinity was a significant predictor of teacher ratings of independence, $F(4,68) = 4.54$, $p < .03$, responsibility, $F(4,68) = 4.03$, $p < .04$, and insight, $F(4,68) = 4.65$, $p < .03$. Femininity and T scores were significant for these three ratings as well. The regression analyses revealed no other significant results at this time of measurement nor in the spring.

In conjunction with these regression analyses, correlations were obtained for scores on the BSRI and teacher ratings. Consistent with the previous results, these correlations further illustrate the observed relationships. Correlations of responsibility and masculinity scores were highly positive by the spring of the sophomore year, $r = .25$, $p < .03$, as well as in the spring of the junior year, $r = .35$, $p < .004$.

Androgyny (T) scores were negatively correlated with the responsibility ratings at this time of measurement as well, $r = -.33$, $p < .01$. Femininity and independence scores were significantly correlated in the fall of the junior year ($r = -.33$, $p < .004$) as were spring masculinity and independence ratings ($r = .35$, $p < .004$). Ratings of the subject's insight were negatively correlated with femininity scores by the fall of the junior year ($r = -.23$, $p < .05$) and by the spring of the same year, insight was highly correlated with masculinity ($r = .35$, $p < .004$). In sum, high responsibility, independence, and insight ratings on the part of homeroom teachers were associated with high masculinity, low femininity, and low T-scores.

DISCUSSION

It appears that increases in ratings of one's own sex-typing occur at some point during the initial year in high school. This was illustrated by significant changes in mean masculinity and femininity BSRI scores between fall and spring semesters of the sophomore year. Less hesitancy to describe oneself as possessing various masculine or feminine characteristics (such as dominance, aggression, warmth, compassion) was noted by these increases. From such a developmental perspective, this suggests that the adolescent female is moving from possessing a rather 'undifferentiated' sex-role orientation (low masculine low feminine) to becoming an individual who characterizes herself as being freer in expression and yet more instrumental in behavior than before (higher masculine, higher feminine ratings). Analyses of androgyny (T) scores would not be sensitive enough to reveal such a development. Therefore, some support is given to the notion that this segment in one's life is a pivotal point for solidification of one's sex-role orientation and expression of basic sex-typed characteristics.

As an adolescent female is integrating her self-perceptions with consistent behavior patterns, it is essential to also explore the reactions of others to this maturing individual. Thus, of great significance in this realm were the relationships observed between self descriptions and teacher estimations of social and instrumental behaviors observed within a classroom environment. Consistent with the suggested movement from an "undifferentiated" sex-role orientation, no relationship between self and other ratings were noted for subjects early in their sophomore year. These students may still be uncertain as to their own sex-role orientation, unsure of how to behave, what roles to play, and how others will react to them. Therefore, teachers and peers may be viewing inconsistent behavioral patterns during the initial months of their high school experience, no definitive sex-role being projected.

However, significant predictability of teacher ratings from sex-role orientation began to emerge in the latter half of the sophomore year and were strong by the fall of the junior year. Interestingly, masculine and feminine self-descriptions were not related to or predictive of teacher perceptions of 'social' characteristics such as friendliness, rapport, sociability, or calmness. Instead, at this time, 'instrumental' behaviors such as responsibility, independence, and insight were significantly predicted by the subjects' perception of her own sex-role orientation. Females high on masculine ratings were evaluated by their teachers as being more responsible, less dependent, and possessing greater insight than adolescents who view themselves as more 'sociable' and expressive - that is, highly stereotyped, 'feminine' adolescents.

What these findings imply is that as an adolescent is resolving her identity crisis, and as a new realm of social, occupational, and

educational experiences is taking hold, she is also learning to more explicitly express her basic sex-role tendencies in academic settings. Perception by the female of her masculine and feminine qualities was strongly related to personality characteristics (as evaluated by the teacher) that could be deemed crucial for perseverance and success in an educational or vocational setting. Independent behavior coupled with responsibility and insight are signs of maturity that have implications for one's academic and career aspirations. A cycle may be set up whereby teachers will reward the 'masculine' characteristics exhibited, increasing their probability of occurrence. This would be especially true for adolescent females who already have a tendency to display precursors of such behaviors. Yet many adolescent females are limited in their behavioral repertoire, typically exhibiting feminine characteristics. The development of instrumental behaviors in these women may be a difficult, challenging process, entailing additional prompting and encouragement on the part of teachers and parents. This is therefore a significant time for teachers, parents and school counselors to be aware of encouraging and rewarding development and expression of the traditionally 'masculine', instrumental personality characteristics in all students so that these are securely incorporated into the adolescent female's identity in addition to the expressive, feminine attributes. Achievement of academic and vocational potentials by adolescent females will be hindered if only the characteristics traditionally considered feminine are reinforced and incorporated into her self structure. Of future research interest is the analysis of eventual career orientations, attitudes towards work and family, and their relationship to earlier orientations and expectations of these females and expectations of others.

In sum, present results suggest that a crucial developmental point,

both personally and vocationally, occurs some time during the transition from early sophomore year experiences to the early months of the junior year. At this time, the self-rating of sex-role is modified and solidified. Based upon the present data, it is conceivable that the projection of this orientation becomes more consistent and more easily interpreted by teachers. Additionally, sex-role characterizations were predictive of independence, insight, and responsibility ratings within the classroom, these being essential ingredients for future academic or vocational success. Future research must consider the male adolescent population to determine the process of incorporation of 'feminine' attributes into their self-structures. Follow-up on the present subjects is also essential to determine whether sex-role orientations are crystalized at this identity stage or whether they are still changeable over time and whether they have predictive potential for career aspirations. Subsequent studies must explore the processes involved in other changes in personality structure during this period to determine transitions and developments related to sex-role orientation.

Reference Notes

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